

July 4th Observations and Update on Benches at Sunset Cliffs
By KEVIN FAULCONER

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Fourth of July weekend was a huge success this year. Our beaches and bays were packed.

I was out walking the boardwalk on the Fourth, from Belmont Park up to Crystal Pier with San Diego police Capt. Shelley Zimmerman of Northern Division. I could tell immediately the vibe was positive.

Everyone seemed to be having a great time.

Our beaches are now safer, cleaner and more family friendly.

There were over 1.2 million people on our city's beaches over that holiday weekend — more than a quarter million more than last year. While traffic and parking citations were up, all other citations and arrests were down 17 percent — from 465 in 2008 to 387 this year.

The police officers from Northern Division and Western Division, along with our firefighters and lifeguards, did an outstanding job.

And a special thanks to Capt. Zimmerman and Capt. Walt Vasquez, each of whom did exceptional work in Mission Beach, Pacific Beach, Mission Bay and Ocean Beach. I also need to recognize Police Chief William Lansdowne and Assistant Chief Boyd Long for their leadership. Both of them were out there on the beach on the Fourth.

On the Monday morning following the holiday weekend, I attended the sixth annual beach clean-up sponsored by Surfrider Foundation's San Diego chapter. I'm happy to report there was very little trash to pick up. The beaches looked great!

"I was pleasantly surprised when I got to the beach this morning and saw the limited mess that was left behind compared to some years in the past," said Bill Hickman, Surfrider's San Diego coordinator. "There was still plenty of work for the volunteers, but they were focusing on smaller items than usual."

I want to thank Surfrider and its volunteers, along with the Clean Beach Coalition, which supplied large cardboard boxes along our beaches and bays for people to put their trash and recyclables.

Farther south, there's some good and bad news to report.

City staff has determined the guardrail benches along Sunset Cliffs in Point Loma are a safety hazard and need to be removed, along with a couple other benches close to the cliff's edge. That's the bad news.

The good news is, as many as 14 new wooden benches will be installed later this year. My office has asked city staff not to remove the existing benches until the new ones are delivered, but those closest to the edge will be

the first to go.

The city is paying for and installing the new benches. Park and Recreation Department staff will work with the public, specifically the Sunset Cliffs Natural Park Recreation Council, to select designs and locations.

As many of you know, city staff recently removed numerous benches from Sunset Cliffs after my office asked for a safety review of the area because a young woman died there. I asked that suggestions and solutions be vetted by the park council. Unfortunately, that didn't happen. I've been assured the public will not be left out of the decision-making process moving forward.

It just so happens that new wooden benches are among the improvements outlined in the Sunset Cliffs Master Plan, which was developed by the park council and other members of the community. I want to thank the council for the pride of ownership it has shown on this issue.

I think the new benches are going to fit in well. I'm looking forward to sitting on one after a long jog or to watch the sunset.

— Council President Pro Tem Kevin L. Faulconer represents District 2 in the city of San Diego, including Ocean Beach and Point Loma.